

# A Millbrook area revival?

## Signs of life in once-stagnant business district on St. George

By JUSTIN GRAEBER, CLIPPER EDITOR  
JUSTIN@DUXBURYCLIPPER.COM

After plans for a mixed-use development fell through several years ago, the Millbrook business neighborhood fell on tough times. Storefronts went vacant, tenants grumbled about the landlord, and business slowed to a crawl. However, new businesses are popping up, and the area is looking for a rebound.

The Millbrook area was once a thriving center of commerce in town, one of the main business areas of Dux-

bury along with Hall's Corner and Snug Harbor. The Back River Fish Market did a brisk business, a gas station brought traffic to a collection of shops on both sides of St. George Street, and the Goodrich lumberyard and hardware store served both contractors and homeowners.

"People always referred to it as the lumber yard, but it was ... also the only hardware store in town," said Gary Durrant, former owner of Millbrook Market. "It was a nice

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little business area. We complimented each other."

But the lumberyard moved to Kingston and the property fell into disrepair – and was briefly on the foreclosure block this summer. (S&G Associates of Duxbury, the company organized to attempt the mixed-use development on the site, filed for Chapter 11 protection in federal bankruptcy court in February. S&G was an arm of Silvia & Silvia, the Osterville-based landlords of the Millbrook building). The fish market went away, the gas pumps dried up and although some businesses thrived – Far-Far's ice cream has always been a summer staple – the area suffered.

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## Millbrook hopes for revival



There have been some changes to the Millbrook business area recently, including the addition of a new grocery store and a liquor mart. Businesspeople in town hope the area is showing signs of revival.

Now, the gas station is back, a quirky taco restaurant is bringing people of all ages to the former fish market, storefronts are filling up and the area seems headed for a comeback.

One of the new stores is Sandy Lambert's Marketplace. Lambert and her husband Bobby Barry are in the space recently vacated by Millbrook Market. Last week, Lambert was overseeing deliveries and the final modifications to the space, although the store has been open for a while.

"We want it to be a family atmosphere, like a general store," she said. "We want to make [people's] lives easier, so they can have a place to get everything at once."

Other Millbrook merchants are hoping the store will anchor a commercial comeback.

"We see the success of the grocery store to be vital to the economy of the area," said Steve Carleton, who owns Far-Far's and the adjacent buildings, at a selectmen's hearing last week.

The store will sell groceries, and there will also be a deli and coffee shop serving breakfast.

She said residents have given her positive feedback about the changes to the space, including a fresh coat of paint and new floors.

Directly across the street, the former owner of Millbrook Market is planning to open a liquor store in the space recently vacated by Sugar, a jewelry store.

Durant said he'd like to keep Millbrook in the name of his new store, but he and his wife haven't finalized a name yet.

"He had an open spot and asked us would we be interested," he said of the owner of the plaza across the street from his former store.

A few weeks ago, the Board of Selectmen unanimously approved a change in location, allowing Durant to take his liquor license to the new location. He is currently awaiting approval by the state

Alcohol Beverages Control Commission.

At the board meeting, some neighbors expressed concern that letting Durant bring his license along would hurt competition - specifically if Lambert decides to seek an alcohol license.

"If you say yes to one [store getting a liquor license] you are saying no to another," said Carlton.

Durant, while he is looking forward to the new business, isn't happy about the way things ended with the market.

"We were forced out of there," he said.

Before Silvia and Silvia bought the building, he said, he had a long-term lease with the previous owner. Recently, he was a tenant-at-will.

"Every time I spoke to Floyd [Silvia] I said how about that lease, and he said you don't have to worry," he said. "But they weren't interested in giving us a lease."

This concern over a lack of communication from the building's owner has been voice before, during the debate over the proposed Millbrook Crossing development. Town officials and a group of residents had expressed concerns over a raised septic system that would have to be installed to allow the development to proceed, and a war of words escalated into actual violence when someone threw a rock through the window of Silvia & Silvia's satellite office in Millbrook. The project was eventually withdrawn, and there is currently nothing pending before the town, although before the foreclosure proceedings this summer there were reports of a sports complex proposed for the former lumberyard site.

Durant said he's hoping the state will approve his license shortly and the business will be open by November.

Other businesses in the area are hoping that new market will bring more traffic into the neighborhood, boosting all the businesses.

"The more cars in the parking lot the better," said Jim Chappuis, owner of My Little Bakery in the Farfar's plaza.

Chappuis is hoping to see increased foot traffic, but he thinks the area could also be better marked.

"It'd be nice if we could have more signage," he said, noting that although his business has been open for two years, he'll still run into people that don't know he exists.

Duxbury Business Association President Terry Reiber says he is hoping the area's revitalization continues.

"Of course I'd like to see that area better utilized as mixed use," he said. "Mixed use to me means the plaza level is shops, things people want to use ... above is apartment or condos."

The Millbrook Crossing development was proposing this type of mixed use before the septic question derailed it.

Reiber said he and other members of the association are sensitive to people in town who want development to look a certain way. But he believes for businesses in Duxbury to thrive, people need to be seen walking around the town's commercial centers.

"I'm not advocating strip malls or anything," he said. "But at some point, someone is going to have to bite the bullet and say, do you want it to crumble?"